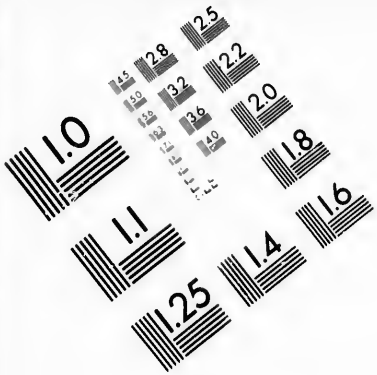

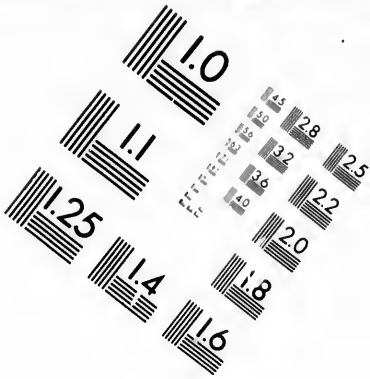

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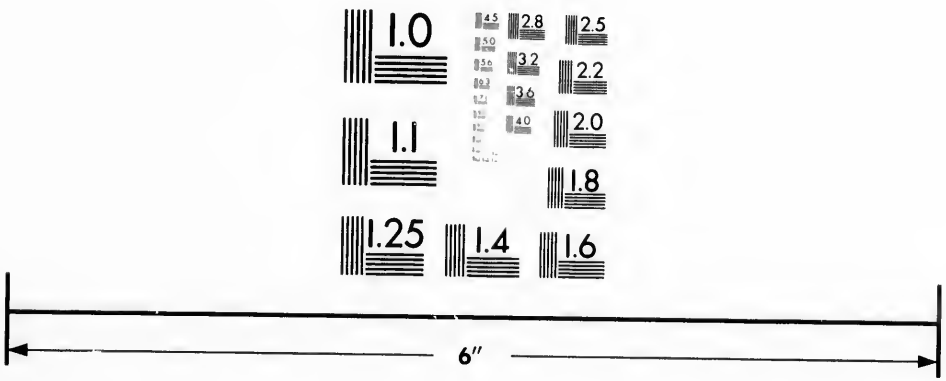

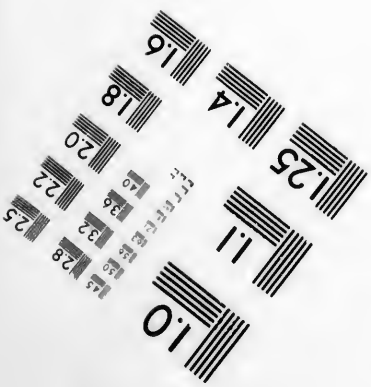

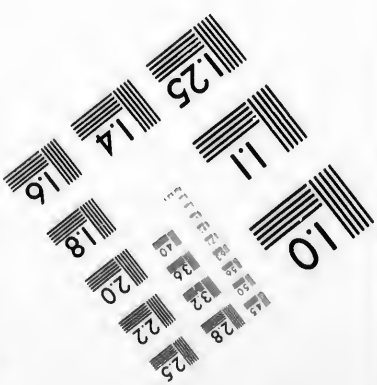

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THE ERIE CANAL:

ITS

ORIGIN,

ITS SUCCESS, AND ITS NECESSITY.

A PAPER

READ BEFORE THE BUFFALO HISTORICAL CLUB

FEBRUARY 3, 1868,

BY MERWIN S. HAWLEY, ESQ.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.

JOSEPH WARREN & CO., PRINTERS,
Courier Office, Buffalo, N. Y.

Our Grand Erie Canal has been a prolific theme for statesmen and politicians, for orators and essayists, during more than half a century. The visions of wealth and greatness that would result from its construction, to our common country, and especially to our own State, which filled the mind of him who first published to the world the project of such a canal, have been eagerly adopted by those who became its advocates. The politician at the caucus, the legislator in the Capitol, and those occupying seats of authority, have been alike emulous of being regarded as its special champions.

Considerations of political economy, and of political and commercial supremacy, in all their various phases, have been urged and repeated in favor of its original construction, and of its subsequent enlargement; and of yet further enlarging and perfecting its capacity, as the increase of its business and the wealth of the country—foretold by its projector—have demonstrated to be necessary.

It was not so from the beginning.

The first promulgation of the project met with such derision that its author was deemed a visionary enthusiast, and the publication of the project was nearly strangled at its birth. The first successful movement in regard to it in the Legislature was treated in much the same manner; a few hundred dollars being appropriated

to defray the expenses of exploring, by the affirmative votes of some who declared that they voted for the small amount, because it could not do any harm and might be productive of some good. And when, after long delay and protracted opposition, and much of that opposition from the city which has derived a large share of its benefits, the Act of April 15th, 1817, was passed by the Legislature, committing the State to the canal policy, the whole scheme narrowly escaped destruction in the Council of Revision.

Nor did opposition to the project disappear immediately after the State entered upon the momentous work; but the progress made by the judicious efforts of those charged with its management, and the far-seeing policy and self-denying labors of the chief executive officer of the State, gradually brought the scheme into general favor, and the story of the beginning, progress and completion of the canal, will perpetuate honors to the memory of CLINTON, so long as the waters of Erie shall flow into that channel of commerce.

The celebration of the completion of the middle section, on the 4th of July, 1820, three years from the day of its commencement, was the culminating point where opposition ceased or was disarmed; and the resources of a united people were thenceforth devoted to the accomplishment of an enterprise which was expected greatly to increase the wealth and the happiness of all the people, and secure to the State, in all coming time, a high and controling position in the trade and commerce of the North American continent.

But previous to this a disposition had been manifested to learn about the "Origin of the Canal," and

who was its first projector, who had first proclaimed to the world the feasibility of such a project, had pointed out the route, had estimated the expense, had foretold the great and varied benefits that would result from it, and had urged the importance of it upon the attention of the public.

Colonel ROBERT TROUP, in the Geneva *Gazette* of December 15, 1819, writes:

"The successful progress of the Erie Canal and the immense benefits likely to arise from its completion, have lately excited a laudable curiosity to know who was the projector of the canal policy in this State. A just regard to the reputation of the State, seems to require that the projector should be favored with some decisive proof of public gratitude."

Colonel Troup, when writing in December, 1819, maintained with much confidence that Elkanah Watson was the projector; but as Mr. Watson, in 1820, disclaimed being the projector of the Erie Canal, claiming only that he projected the lake canal policy which produced the Act of March, 1792, chartering the "Western Inland Lock Navigation Company," Col. Troup, in his letter of February 8, 1822, addressed to the Hon. Brockholst Livingston, to quote his own language: "Abstains from bestowing on Mr. Watson any credit for that sublime effort of human intellect which projected the canal route to lake Erie," and he adds, "As this sublime effort is pregnant with incalculable benefits to the State, I bow with sentiments of profound respect and gratitude, to the man whose genius had the capacity to conceive and usher into public notice, the design of a work so stupendous."

Various claims were put forth to the honor of being the first to "suggest" such a project, or being the first

who had "talked of it"—and for the honor of being its first "projector"—and it is not surprising, perhaps, that some claims of this character were made, which are not well supported by the acts and promulgations of the person in whose behalf the claim is made.

Many distinguished names are entitled to lasting honors for the services they rendered during the incipient movements and the whole progress of construction, and to none more, than to those who so successfully performed the essential part of engineers.

In seeking for the facts on which the claim of being the "first projector" is to be sustained, (if sustained at all,) we necessarily look for what was said, or written, or done by the person; and his writings, or other promulgations, made known or recorded at the time of their occurrence, must be conclusive. And if any doubt exist in regard to his meaning, or as to what was in the mind of the person when making any particular expression, his subsequent writings on the same subject afford the best explanations of which they are susceptible. Especially will such evidences have a controling influence in our minds when seeking for the truth, over statements made from memory only, after the decease of the person, and twenty or fifty years after the incident is stated to have occurred.

The Paper which I had the honor to read before this Society on the 21st February, 1866, briefly notes or indicates the principal facts necessary to a solution of the question: Who was the first projector of the canal? Showing that in the year 1724 Cadwallader Colden suggested that there might be found a continuous inland water communication between the Oswego river and Lake Erie; that in 1797 Gen. Philip Schuyler and an

English engineer, William Weston had "talked of" a water communication through the State to Lake Erie, keeping the interior, if it were practicable, which they doubted; showing also the facts and circumstances relied upon to sustain the claim made by friends of Gouverneur Morris, since his decease, that he was the "first projector;" also showing briefly the writings of Jesse Hawley on the subject; and the action of the Legislature on the motion of Joshua Forman.

The Papers written by JESSE HAWLEY, and signed "Hercules," the first of which was published in Pittsburg, Penn., in the newspaper called the *Commonwealth*, on the 14th January, 1807, and subsequently in the *Genesee Messenger*, at Canandaigua, in this State, beginning in October, 1807, and extending to fourteen numbers—some of which newspapers are now in the archives of this Society through the courtesy of the Hon. T. T. Flagler, of Lockport, are the first publications of the project for this canal.

Those Papers, after pointing out the feasibility of a canal on nearly the identical line now occupied by it, recommending its size to be one hundred feet wide and ten feet deep, estimating its cost with great accuracy, and in many ways urging public attention to its importance and the propriety of an actual survey, proceed to point out other important improvements in other States, some of which have since been constructed; among which are the Ohio Canal, the Wabash Canal, the St. Marie Canal, to open navigation into Lake Superior, the Fox and Wisconsin rivers connection, the Illinois and Michigan Canal, the Canal around the falls of the Ohio river, etc.

Mr. Hawley originally "intended to deposit those papers in the archives of the office of the Secretary of State, in order to preserve the evidences of his claim to the first writings on the subject," but they are, by his will, deposited with the Historical Society of the city of New York. He writes, "I claim the original and the first publication of the overland route of the Erie Canal."

Again Mr. Hawley writes in the *Daily Democrat* newspaper of Rochester, October 6, 1835, as follows:

"To the Public.—The purport of the following letters will sufficiently explain their object. While their originals are intended to be preserved, they are published at the present time to establish their authenticity hereafter, and also to give the present age an opportunity to rectify any supposed errors therein. In order to aid their circulation in this paper, extra copies will be sent to many public men and personal friends."

The letters which followed contained various evidences of the correctness of his claim, and closed in the *Daily Democrat* of October 10, 1835, with the following:

"To the Public.—I now reassert my claim to the original conception of the project of the overland route of the Erie Canal, * * * and also state that the imputations to the contrary, communicated to Dr. Hosack by some of his correspondents, were altogether inaccurate, and must have originated in forgetfulness or misapprehension. I do not wish to be understood as saying that I was the first or the only person who *conceived* the idea. I merely mean to say that with me it was a *native thought*, without having been suggested or communicated to me by any person, and that I was the first person who wrote and published the project."

Colonel Troup, in his letter to Brockholst Livingston, of February 8, 1822, already referred to, says, "In October, 1807, Jesse Hawley commenced the publication in the *Ontario Messenger*, of a series of essays in

favor of opening a canal to Lake Erie, which was the first public annunciation of the present system."

Governor DEWITT CLINTON writes, "The first hint on this subject which I have seen in print was suggested by Jesse Hawley. * * * On the 27th of October, 1807, he commenced a series of essays on internal navigation, over the signature of 'Hercules,' in the *Ontario Messenger*, which extended to fourteen numbers." And Governor Clinton said to Judge Benjamin Wright, "the essays of 'Hercules,' in the *Ontario Messenger*, were the first suggestions in a tangible shape which he could find of the origin of the canal."

ELKANAH WATSON, writing in 1819, says, "I have not been able to trace any measure, public or private, tending towards this great enterprise, (the Erie Canal,) till the 27th of October, 1807, when an anonymous publication under the signature of 'Hercules' appeared in the *Genesee Messenger*, which is attributed to Jesse Hawley, Esq. These valuable essays continued through a course of fourteen weekly numbers, to March 2, 1808. They are evidently original, and they display deep research and views vastly extended—indeed, they may be pronounced prophetic, in striking out nearly the track of the route of the canal which has since been adopted."

Since the reading of the Paper before this Society on the 21st February, 1866, hereinbefore alluded to, exceptions to the claims of Jesse Hawley have been made by George Geddes, Esq., who, in a Paper read before this Society, on the 4th of February, 1867, claims that Gouverneur Morris was the projector of the canal; and so confident is Mr. Geddes in the correctness of his theory, that he seems to think it presumptuous for any one to "claim the honor of first proposing the interior

route, without having received the suggestion as coming from Mr. Morris;" and that objecting to the claim made in behalf of Mr. Morris is "caviling." He also says that "recently very groundless claims to this honor have been revived."

The theory of Mr. GEDDES is founded upon a letter from Governor Morgan Lewis to Hermanus Bleecker, dated May 26th, 1828; the letter from Mr. Morris to John Parish, dated December 20th, 1800; the letter from Simeon DeWitt to William Darby, dated February 25th, 1822; the letter of James Geddes to William Darby, dated February 22d, 1822; and the fact as stated, that "Mr. Morris was a projector, he had seen canals in Europe," etc.

The propositions of Mr. Geddes are ingeniously supported, and with as much consistency, apparently, as could be exercised, while omitting all reference to Mr. Morris's writings, except the one letter already alluded to; and he builds up the following quadrangular column, that Mr. Morris told Mr. DeWitt of the project in 1803; that DeWitt told it to James Geddes in 1804; that Mr. Geddes told it to Jesse Hawley in 1806, or as Mr. Geddes afterwards states, in 1805; and says that James Geddes was so impressed with the statement he had heard from Mr. DeWitt, that he formed public opinion, until in 1807, Joshua Forman was elected to the Assembly as a "canal man;" and to support the claim, that Mr. Forman's election as a "canal man" was based on the idea of a direct overland canal to Lake Erie, Mr. Geddes quotes from the *recollections* of Judge Strong, now 85 years old, of what occurred in 1804; from a letter written by Thomas Wheeler in 1846, giving some of his recollections of occurrences in 1807; and some state-

ments by Mr. Gillchres, giving his recollections of 1806. All these vague statements are from recollections of scenes many years previous, and but faint allusion to an overland canal is made in any of them.

The promulgations of Mr. MORRIS do not sustain the claim that he was the projector of the Erie Canal. A correct interpretation of what he said and wrote fails to show that he had any conception of such a project until the year 1810, when, as one of the seven commissioners appointed that year to make explorations, in a consultation of all the commissioners, at Rome, July 12, 1810, Mr. Morris expressed himself in favor of an overland canal. Mr. Geddes says, after relating this incident, "Though Mr. Morris had been considering the subject of a water communication from the great lakes to the Hudson ever since 1777, (thirty-three years,) and had visited the canals of Europe, he had not arrived at any true conception of what the face of the country would permit of being done." And Mr. Morris writes to Mr. Henry Latrobe, April 25th, 1810, advising of the appointment of those seven commissioners, and adds, "I hope the business may be effected in a proper manner, * * * * but I fear our minds are not yet enlarged to the size of so great an object."

The commissioners had with them in that tour of exploration the essays of Mr. Hawley, signed "Hercules," a long letter from Joseph Ellicott, giving information of the country between the Niagara and Genesee rivers, with an explanatory map, and the report by James Geddes of his surveys in 1808, made in pursuance of the motion of Judge Forman; and it is probable that the thirty-three years consideration of the subject by Mr. Morris enabled him to perceive the value of those

documents, and thus prompted him to put himself on record in favor of an overland canal to Lake Erie.

An expression of Governor SEWARD, in the introduction to his Natural History of New York, is quoted by Mr. Geddes and others, in support of the claim in behalf of Mr. Morris; but as Governor Seward takes a quotation from Mr. Morris's letter to John Parish, in December, 1800, as the ground of his opinion, he adds no strength to the claim beyond that afforded by the letter.

CADWALLADER D. COLDEN, in his memoirs of the canal, gives a brief and impartial statement of the views deduced from Mr. Morris's letter to John Parish, and from Mr. DeWitt's letter to William Darby, and comes to the conclusion that Mr. Morris contemplated only the route by Lake Ontario, with a ship canal around Niagara Falls, as provided by the Act of 1798, incorporating the Niagara Company.

Under an "errata" on a fly-leaf at the end of the volume, Mr. Colden says, "It is due to Mr. Morris to mention that *since the Memoir was written*, the author has ascertained that when, in the year 1800, Mr. Morris suggested the practicability of enabling ships to sail from London into Lake Erie; and when, in 1803, he spoke of 'tapping Lake Erie,' he undoubtedly contemplated a water communication directly from that lake to the Hudson."

Mr. Colden probably received this information from some person interested and the kindness of his heart, prompting him to honor the memory of his departed friend, he affixed the above paragraph to a fly-leaf, apparently after a portion of the edition had been printed. He could not have derived the information from Mr. Morris's writings, as we shall presently see.

Dr. Hosack, who investigated this subject more thoroughly than any other writer, gives it as his opinion that it is "questionable how far Mr. Morris, (notwithstanding his conversation with Simeon DeWitt in 1803,) had, prior to 1810, when he was appointed one of the Canal Commissioners, seriously contemplated any other communication between the Hudson and Lake Erie, than the route by Oswego and Lake Ontario."

Dr. Hosack expresses some disappointment that the family of his old friend Mr. Morris did not furnish him, on his application, the "documents" to sustain the views that had been imputed to him.

Mr. Morris was a man of rare qualities. He held several important and honorable public positions, and his liberal education derived improvement from his extensive travels. He is said to have been a "projector." He had the superintendence of a large tobacco business in Virginia, in connection with Robert Morris (who was not a family relative); and some dealings with French traders, which he had "projected," gave him occasion to go to France in December, 1788, to institute legal proceedings there to enforce payments.

While in France, Mr. Morris projected a sale of twenty thousand barrels of flour, to the French government, which resulted in loss. He also projected, in connection with some capitalists in Holland, extensive speculations in the United States securities, which the French Minister of Finance was desirous to realize upon, as the troublesome times of the French Revolution began to be felt. A very important part of his business, also, was to find purchasers for some wild lands belonging to himself, Robert Morris and others, lying mostly in the State of New York, in the county of St. Lawrence.

Mr. Morris and M. Leray de Chaumont having realized by loans from M. Necker, thirty-eight thousand dollars on their bonds secured by lands in this country, which investment M. Necker seems to have made for the benefit of his daughter Madame de Stael, she prevailed upon her father to appropriate twenty thousand dollars for the purchase of lands in America for herself direct; in pursuance of which a purchase of twenty-three thousand acres was made in St. Lawrence county, New York, under the direction of M. Necker, by M. Leray, with the advice of Mr. Morris, who was consulted as being a friend to the parties, and, owning lands in the same vicinity, was well acquainted with their value.

Mr. Morris returned from Europe in December, 1798. In the summer of 1800 he made the journey which he so glowingly described in his letter to John Parish, dated at the city of Washington, December 20, 1800, which has already been alluded to. In that letter he says, "In July last I left home to visit some property of my own, and some which was confided to my care by others, in the northern part of the State of New York. I went by way of Albany and the lakes George and Champlain, to Montreal." From Montreal "we took boat and went up the St. Lawrence to Lake Ontario, and along the south side of that lake to Niagara; thence by land to Lake Erie, and so back again." "After one days' repose at Niagara, we went to view the Falls; * * * from the Falls towards Lake Erie, along the bank of Niagara river, * * * we proceed to Fort Erie." "Here * * * I saw riding at anchor nine vessels, the least of them one hundred tons. * * * Does it not seem like magic? * * * Hundreds of large ships will in no distant period bound on the billows of those inland seas.

At this point commences a navigation of more than a thousand miles. Shall I lead your astonishment to the verge of incredulity? I will. Know, then, that one-tenth of the expense borne by Britain in the last campaign, would enable ships to sail from London, through Hudson's river, into Lake Erie." Writing of taxes and finance, in the same letter, Mr. Morris says, "In 1760 there was not, perhaps, ten thousand dollars of specie in this country. At present, the banks in Philadelphia alone have above ten millions to dispose of, beyond the demand."

We will hope that those banks are relatively as rich in specie funds at the present time.

The expressions here quoted, particularly that relating to ships sailing through Hudson river into Lake Erie, have been treated as the *sure foundation* of a claim to his being the projector of the Erie Canal; although he was well aware of the existence and operations of the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company, for improving the navigation between Schenectady and Oswego by the Mohawk river and Oneida lake and river, and he was, of course, well advised of the legislative action two years previously, incorporating the "Niagara Company," for the purpose of constructing a ship canal around Niagara Falls.

The truth is, as we will soon see, that Mr. Morris could not have had in his mind, when writing those expressions, any other route to Lake Erie than the one by Lake Ontario and Niagara river; for his own subsequent writings on the subject, which are clear and unambiguous, are the best explanations of any ambiguity in the expressions just quoted.

But first, let us look at one or two other incidents that are claimed as furnishing supporting evidence to the theory that Mr. Morris meant the *Erie* Canal.

The first is of an earlier date, which is a letter written by Governor Morgan Lewis to Hermanus Bleecker, dated May 26, 1828, written in reply to a letter from Mr. Bleecker asking him to write out his recollections of some remarks made by Mr. Morris, when at General Schuyler's headquarters at Fort Edward in 1777.

Governor Lewis writes that Mr. Morris was sanguine of our success in the war, "and spoke in animated terms of the rapid march of the useful arts through our country when once freed from a foreign yoke. One evening he announced in language highly poetic, that at no very distant day the waters of the great western inland seas would, by the aid of man, break through their barriers and mingle with those of the Hudson."

Governor Lewis was seventy-four years old when he wrote that letter, giving his recollections of the language used by Mr. Morris fifty-one years previously; and when we call to mind the ardor of feelings that would naturally arise in the mind of a youthful officer in the army on receiving a visit from his friend and classmate, and that at the time of writing, the canal, unthought of in those earlier days, was in the full-tide of success and popularity, and that Governor Lewis writes entirely from recollections, and does not pretend to quote a word as being Mr. Morris's language, we will necessarily make some allowance for his interest in behalf of his early friend, and give such weight to the statements, as, in connection with other evidences, they shall seem entitled to.

Another incident, stated from memory and second-handed, some thirty years after it is said to have occurred

has been related to support the claim in behalf of Mr. Morris. It is said to have been communicated by S. DeWitt Bloodgood as obtained from Mr. K. K. Van Rensselaer. It is, that at a dinner party in Washington, soon after the date of Morris's letter to John Parish, the locality of the seat of government was discussed, and Newburg, on the Hudson river, was suggested as a proper place.

Mr. Morris said, "Yes, this would have been the place, and the members of Congress could have come from all parts by water." "Come by water!" exclaimed the company, "but how?" "By tapping Lake Erie and bringing its waters to the Hudson." "How could you bring them?" "By an inclined plane." "But that would be too expensive." "Well, then," said he, "there is a water-table which can be found."

This story is probably from the lively imagination of some ardent friend of Mr. Morris,—and its invalidity, so far as furnishing evidence of Mr. Morris being the projector of the Erie Canal,—and the invalidity of the views drawn from the letter of Morgan Lewis, as well as the great mistake made, and often repeated, in claiming that in his letter to John Parish, from which extracts have been made, Mr. Morris foretold the *Erie* Canal, are all conclusively shown by Mr. Morris himself, in his letter to General Henry Lee, dated January 22d, 1801. General Lee had written to Mr. Morris, on the sixteenth of January, asking him to write out fully his views in regard to improvements of the country by additional water communications, and Mr. Morris, after gracefully acknowledging the receipt of the letter, says, "I will sketch out to you a general idea of what has occurred

to my observation and reflection respecting the commerce of our interior country, the political consequences which may result from it, and the means we possess of rendering that commerce and those consequences favorable to our Government and propitious to our future prosperity." And he proceeds to show the natural outlet to the ocean by the Mississippi and St. Lawrence rivers, the political and commercial importance to the country of improvements in the interior, and says:

"If we improve the means held out to us by the beneficent hand of Nature, we may obtain for ourselves all the advantages now enjoyed by foreign and rival powers. Nay, we may procure for our mercantile fellow-citizens much greater advantages. * * * The navigation between the Hudson and Lake Ontario, by the Mohawk and Wood Creek has been feebly and faintly attempted by a private company. * * * In my opinion, nothing short of the conveyance of a vessel of one hundred tons * * * is worthy of public attention. * * * But you will ask me if this be possible. I answer, that as far as I can judge from observation and information, it is not only practicable but easy, though expensive. To show this I need only say that Lake Ontario is considerably higher than the Hudson, that the shores of that lake and the river flowing out of it, are not high, that it furnishes an immense but equable stream of water, and that no mountains intervene. An inclined plane may, I believe, be found from the Ontario to the Hudson, but to Lake Champlain it most certainly exists."

This letter is unambiguous and shows what were the views of the writer. It was written several weeks after the date of the letter to John Parish from which our previous quotations were made, and it is in itself, evidence that the writer of it had no definite conception of the interior overland route to Lake Erie.

Mr. Morris wielded the pen of a ready writer; his mind was clear and comprehensive, and he would never have written that letter and omitted saying in it, any

word about a direct canal through the interior to Lake Erie, if he had had any conception in his mind of the feasibility of such a project.

Here, in all probability, is to be seen the reason why the family of Mr. Morris declined to give Dr. Hosack access to his writings, that the documents relating to a canal might all be published in his "Memoirs."

Mr. Morris was desirous of having a water communication opened that would give access to the eastern markets, from his lands and those of his friend Madame de Stael, lying in St. Lawrence county, without encountering the tedious journey by land, through the new and unopened country that lay between them and the tide-waters, as his letter to General Lee clearly shows; and his subsequent acts and writings in regard to improvements in the interior, are directed to this end.

In September, 1803, he made a journey, by way of the Mohawk river, Oneida and Ontario lakes, to St. Lawrence county, to see his lands there. Stopping over night in Schenectady, on his way up, he had an interview in his hotel, with Simeon DeWitt, who was Surveyor-General of the State; and, as Mr. Morris was interested in procuring some improvements that would be beneficial to his lands, and as the novel project of locking up and around the falls of Niagara had recently been authorized by the Legislature, and as neither the Western Inland Navigation Company nor the Northern Inland Navigation Company, (the latter designed for opening communication between the northern section of Hudson river and Lake Champlain,) were affording facilities for business to the extent that had been expected of them; the conversation of the two gentlemen

naturally turned upon improving the means of intercourse with the interior. No records are furnished us of what they said, and as the conversation was of that free and informal kind by which they pleasantly whiled away the evening, it is not probable that either of them made any notes of what was said, or expected ever to have occasion to refer to it again.

In 1822, however, the Erie Canal had not only been *projected*, but after hard struggles, it was nearly completed, and was very popular throughout the State and elsewhere; and Mr. DeWitt, in a letter, dated February 25th, 1822, to William Darby, who had requested materials to be introduced into the Encyclopedia, writes as follows, among other things:

"A considerable discussion * * * has appeared in print about the origin of the Erie Canal, with the view of ascertaining who is most entitled to the honor of it. * * * The merit of first starting the idea of a direct communication by water, between Lake Erie and Hudson's river, unquestionably belongs to Mr. Gouverneur Morris. The first suggestion I had of it was from him. In 1803, I accidentally met with him at Schenectady. We put up for the night at the same inn, and passed the evening together. Among the numerous topics of conversation to which his prolific mind and excursive imagination gave birth, was that of improving the means of intercourse with the interior of our State. He then mentioned the project of tapping Lake Erie, as he expressed himself, and leading its waters in an artificial river directly across the country to Hudson's river. * * * Considering this as a romantic thing and characteristic of the man, I related it on several occasions. Mr. Geddes now reminds me that I mentioned it to him in 1804, when he was here as a member of the Legislature; and adds that afterwards when in company with Jesse Hawley, it became a subject of conversation which probably led to inquiries that induced Mr. Hawley to write the essays which afterwards appeared in newspapers, on the subject of carrying a canal from Lake Erie to Albany, through the interior of the country without going by the way of Lake Ontario."

After relating the action of the Legislature on the motion of Judge Forman in 1808, directing surveys to be made, Mr. DeWitt continues and says, "he commissioned James Geddes to make the surveys, and instructed him to survey two different routes for a canal from Oneida Lake to Lake Ontario, one by way of Oswego river, and one by Salmon river, which runs into Lake Ontario some distance east of Oswego (in the town of Mexico)." Mr. Geddes was instructed next to level around the Niagara Falls and ascertain the best line for a canal from above the Falls to Lewiston, and Mr. DeWitt says in the letter, "I had received such information from Mr. Joseph Ellicott * * * as satisfied me that a canal was practicable from the Niagara to the Genesee river;" hence Mr. Geddes was instructed that he need not make surveys in that section.

This letter of Mr. DeWitt's was written about nineteen years after that interview with Mr. Morris in Schenectady, entirely from memory, and it does not pretend to quote from Mr. Morris a single word, but it italicises the words *tapping Lake Erie;* and during the interval of time very much had been said and written, by many persons, in regard to canals.

That Mr. DeWitt labored under forgetfulness or misapprehension, or else drew upon his imagination, when writing that letter and stating that Mr. Morris spoke "of tapping Lake Erie and leading its waters directly across the country to the Hudson, and that he is unquestionably entitled to the merit of first starting the idea of such a canal," will appear by our following Mr. Morris a little further on that journey. At Rome he had a conversation with Charles C. Broadhead, an engineer, on the subject of canals, and, as Mr. Broadhead says, "Mr.

Morris inquired very particularly as to the situation and soil of the land along the Oneida lake and the banks of the Oneida and Oswego rivers, and the country lying between the Oneida and Ontario lakes;" and Mr. Broadhead continues, "if I mistake not, he spoke of the waters of the Salmon river and Bruce's Creek, the former empties into Lake Ontario, and the latter into Oneida Lake. * * * It is my impression that Lake Erie was not mentioned in this conversation. After answering Mr. Morris's inquiries as far as I was able, he declared he would give five hundred dollars to be a member of the Legislature that year, that he might get a law passed for a canal from the Hudson river, and I think I cannot be mistaken when I say to Lake Ontario."

Mr. Morris here shows the same interest for improvements to communicate with his lands in St. Lawrence county, that was indicated in his letter to General Lee, two years previously; and in that interview with Mr. Broadhead, is not manifested any conception of an idea of a canal through the interior to Lake Erie, as Mr. DeWitt, nineteen years afterward, imagined he had done at Schenectady.

A little further on his journey, at Three River Point, the same views are unmistakably indicated by Mr. Morris's writing in his diary, September 12th, 1803, (for Mr. Morris kept a diary many years.) Of a canal he writes, "it should be taken from the head of Onondaga river and carried on the level as far east as it will go, and if practicable, into the Mohawk river. * * * This canal, I think, should be five feet deep and forty-five feet wide. A branch might easily he carried to Lake Ontario." Not a word was written about Lake

Erie, nor about a canal of any kind to any place west of Onondaga river; and it is not to be supposed that, considering the fluency with which Mr. Morris wrote, he would have omitted any allusion to an overland canal to Lake Erie, if he had had any conception of one in his mind.

Thus we see that the ambiguity in Mr. Morris's letter to John Parish, and the vague and romantic recollections of Mr. DeWitt in his letter to William Darby, *can not be reconciled* with Mr. Morris's letters, his diary, and his actions, and with his conversation with Mr. Brodhead—except on the theory that he meant, as he wrote, a water communication from Lake Ontario to the Hudson river; and to this view *all* his writings and actions point with entire harmony. If he used the expression, tapping Lake Erie, in his conversation with Mr. DeWitt, he of course referred to the project for a canal around Niagara Falls.

James Geddes, in a letter to Wiiliam Darby, of February 22, 1822, says, "in the winter of 1804, I learned, for the first time, from the Surveyor-General, that Gouverneur Morris in a conversation between them the preceding autumn, mentioned the scheme of a canal from Lake Erie across the country to the Hudson river," and that it made a great "impression" on his mind.

This letter is written *from memory*, eighteen years after the incident is stated to have occurred, and the misapprehension under which it was written is seen in the fact, as herein shown, that Mr. Morris *could not* have mentioned the scheme of a canal from Lake Erie across the country, but that in 1803 he was devising a plan for a canal from Onondaga river to the Mohawk, and also

down to Lake Ontario; a scheme which, in the isolated condition of Onondaga county at that time was well calculated to excite the attention of her people.

Judge Geddes was, in 1804, a member of the Legislature. Mr. DeWitt was Surveyor-General of the State, and Mr. Morris had held several high official stations. All of them were public men, and *public spirited* men, and it is not probable that they all would have omitted or neglected the opportunity to bring the scheme before the public, if they had been "impressed" with the importance of such a work as a canal through the interior from Lake Erie, or had entertained any conception of the feasibility of such a project.

Thus we see that the *basis* on which the claim is founded that Mr. Morris was the projector of the Erie Canal, proves to be unsound; and of course the structure built upon it must fail. If Mr. Morris were now living, it is probable that his honorable impulses would constrain him, as did Elkanah Watson, to announce that he designed canaling between the Hudson river and Lake Ontario, and around Niagara Falls, and did *not* contemplate a direct canal through the country to Lake Erie.

Judge Geddes and Jesse Hawley, in their letters to Dr. Hosack, in 1828, (each one writing without the knowledge of the other,) agree in regard to the *time* of their interview in Geneva, that it was "in the winter of 1806," "the winter before he wrote his essays;" and it is written that the testimony of two men is true. But Judge Geddes claims to have "perfect recollection of informing Mr. Hawley of the project," and has "no doubt but that I informed him the idea came from Mr. Morris." And Mr. Hawley writes: "I do not recollect that any mention

was made of the canal when we met in Geneva. If there was, I presume that I first spoke of it. * * * I afterwards saw Mr. Geddes at his house in Onondaga, in 1811, when we conversed on the subject, I believe for the first time." And in 1835, Mr. Hawley writes: "With me, it was a native thought—without having been suggested or communicated to me by any person." When Judge Geddes wrote that letter to Dr. Hosack, he knew he was writing for history, and would be more likely to be correct in his dates than when writing a newspaper paragraph in 1835, in which he says his visit to Geneva was in 1805, instead of 1806. But as we have seen, his impression that he communicated the idea of the Erie Canal, must be confounded with the interest which he and others naturally took in the project of a local canal, which Mr. Morris indicated in his diary.

The Paper read by George Geddes, Esq., maintains that Judge Geddes was so deeply impressed with the idea of a direct overland route for a canal—as coming from Mr. Morris—that he did not rest, but formed public opinion until 1807, when Judge Forman was elected to the Legislature as a "Canal man" "on the question of a canal across the country, not by Lake Ontario;" and says Judge Forman was an eminent lawyer and an accomplished scholar, and his grace of person and manner gave him much influence with his associates. He was President of the village of Syracuse in 1825.

This accomplished gentleman, on whom the argument of Mr. Geddes centres, wrote to Dr. Hosack on the subject of the Erie Canal, October 13, 1828, from which letter I quote as follows:

"On taking my seat as member of Assembly for the county of Onondaga, at the session of 1807–8, my bookseller handed me several copies of 'Rees's Cyclopedia,' to which I was a subscriber. I had early been acquainted with the projected works of the Inland Lock Navigation Company, from the Hudson river to Lake Ontario, and had seen in the statute book an Act to incorporate a company to lock up the Niagara Falls from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. In reading at my leisure in the article 'Canal,' an account of the numerous canals and improved river navigation in England, I soon discovered the relative importance of the former over the latter. Applying this to our interior, I perceived how much more the country would be benefited by a canal than by the works contemplated; and * * * it occurred to me that if a canal was ever made to open a communication from the Hudson to the western lakes, it would be worth more than all the extra cost to go directly through the country to Lake Erie. * * * Sitting with Judge Wright and General McNiel, my room-mates, I broached the subject to them. At first, Judge Wright objected that it would be folly to make a canal one hundred and fifty miles abreast of a good sloop navigation in Lake Ontario. * * * The subject was freely discussed. Judge Wright gave in to the plan, and it was agreed by all that the project was of immense importance, and that measures ought to be taken to ascertain its practicability. I drew up the resolution, which Judge Wright agreed to second."

From that resolution sprung the legislative action under which the first surveys were made, by Judge Geddes, in 1808.

Judge Forman does not write as if he had been "elected to the Assembly as a canal man, on the question of a canal across the country, *not* by Lake Ontario;" but, entirely inconsistent with such an idea. In his argument in support of the motion which he introduced, he pointed out nearly the same route for a canal as had been delineated in the first number of the "Hercules" papers by Mr. Hawley, published in Pittsburg, and in the second number, published in Canandaigua. Judge Forman continues:

"I conversed frequently during the season, with Judge Geddes, and explained to him my views on the subject of the interior route." * * * "I should have been satisfied, so far as I am concerned, had not the Surveyor-General, in a letter to William Darby, given a new turn to the investigation, * * giving an impression that my resolution had grown out of that suggestion of Gouverneur Morris. * * * Mr. Morris had traveled and seen canals in other countries, and no doubt had bright visions of the future improvements of this country; * * * but it was nowise probable that he viewed them as works to be accomplished in his day, or, as a patriot, he would have proposed the subject to the Legislature. * * His suggestions * * had no more effect in producing the canal, than the ancient poet's song of the 'Fortunate Islands beyond the Atlantic Ocean' had in producing the discovery of America."

The resolution introduced into the Assembly by Judge Forman in 1808, resulted in directing the Surveyor-General to cause a "survey to be made of the rivers, streams and waters, in the usual route of communication between the Hudson river and Lake Erie, and such other contemplated route as he may deem proper," thus leaving the whole matter very much in his discretion; and that Mr. DeWitt was not at this time very much impressed with such views as he writes, in 1822, had been communicated to him by Morris in 1803, is seen by his instructions in regard to making that survey, given to James Geddes, under date of June 11th, 1808, already stated; which read as if he exercised the discretion given him to promote the object which Mr. Morris had in view in his journey by way of Oswego, in 1803, to his lands in St. Lawrence county; for the first thing he instructed Mr. Geddes to do was to look for the best place for a canal from Oneida Lake to Lake Ontario, in the town of Mexico. And Judge Geddes is not so much impressed in behalf of an interior route to Lake Erie as to offer any remonstrance against expend-

ing the time and the money appropriated for those surveys, almost exclusively upon the Ontario route.

And that Mr. DeWitt labored under some forgetfulness or misapprehension in regard to this matter, is conclusively shown by an incongruity he perpetrates in his instructions to Judge Geddes in 1808, and in his letter to Mr. Darby in 1822, stating in the first that "As Joseph Ellicott *has* given me a description of the country from Tonnewanta Creek to the Genesee river * * * it is important to have exploration continued to Seneca river. No leveling or survey of it will be necessary for the present, * * * a view of the ground only, with such information as may be obtained from others, is all that can now be required of you." And in the letter to Mr. Darby he says, "I *had* received such information from Joseph Ellicott, etc."

That information and description of the country was sent to Mr. DeWitt several weeks after his instructions were issued to Mr. Geddes, which was the 11th of June, 1808, and Mr. Ellicott's communication of that valuable information is dated Batavia, July 30th, 1808, and begins by acknowledging the receipt of Mr. DeWitt's letter of June 13th, 1808, in which Mr. DeWitt asks for the information, which Mr. Ellicott then proceeds to give.

The Legislature of 1810 appointed Gouverneur Morris, DeWitt Clinton, and five others, a board of commissioners "for exploring the whole route for inland navigation from Hudson's river to Lake Ontario and Lake Erie." That board of commissioners entered upon their duties on the 1st of July following, having with them the writings of Jesse Hawley on the subject of a canal, and other valuable documents, as we have seen; and Mr. Morris,

while on that tour of exploration, on the 12th of July, 1810, put himself on record *for the first time* in favor of a direct overland canal to Lake Erie.

What followed, in the complex and protracted preliminaries, in the beginning, the progress and completion of that gigantic work, has been delineated before this Society on previous occasions.

We have seen that the canal *was* "projected;" and while we cannot claim for any person that he was the first or only one who "conceived" the idea, yet, that the views promulgated in the "Hercules" papers by Jesse Hawley in 1807, were original, native thoughts with him, and the first publication of such a project, is too well established to need further elucidation.

After many delays and much anxiety in behalf of the Canal, the State finally entered upon the work of its construction on the 4th of July, 1817, and its completion on the 26th of October, 1825, was announced by such a *feu de joie* as had not been previously known in any age; and we are witnesses to-day, that the predictions of its effects upon our country and people, made by its earliest advocates, have been more than realized.

To recount its influence in attracting the husbandman from all parts of the world to cultivate the rich unbroken soil of the vast country west of us, in inviting the mechanic and the enterprizing trader, the men of science and the political economist, to occupy that broad domain, and organize States, build up towns and cities, and extend the blessings of civilization, would be only repeating what has many times been said.

To narrate the growth and extent of the material and social prosperity that is traceable directly to the Erie Canal would tax the capacity of man to appreciate them.

D. J. P. writes 5 pages & draws N. C. 5 Sept 17.

Not a State in what we call the West, nor one of the many opulent cities in that region, but owes its organic existence or its prosperity to the influence of that great work.

In 1825 the cities of St. Louis and Cincinnati would have smiled derisively upon any proposition that within the ensuing generation they would be eclipsed by a city on the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan, which then had no existence. The cities of Chicago, Milwaukee, Toledo and others may be said to have been born of the Canal.

Our own city, with its broad and extensive avenues, its humane and benevolent institutions, its gorgeous buildings, its wealth and population, and, above all, its magnificent ships and extensive commerce, is a proud witness of the propriety of the undertaking, and of the success which has followed it. The first wheat brought to this port—two thousand five hundred bushels in 1828—found no market here; the trade which the Canal inspired had not then been put into action. The arrivals of grain and flour in a single year recently have been equal to nearly seventy three million bushels.

The tolls paid to the State on property shipped on the Canal from this port in any one year as late as 1840, scarcely exceeded three hundred thousand dollars. They have since exceeded three million dollars in a single year.

The benefits resulting from the Canal have been felt and enjoyed in every county and town throughout the State; the increase in the value of all real property being in the aggregate many times greater than the cost of its construction.

The city of New York, in whose growth and prosperity we take a just pride, has derived from this Canal

greater benefits, perhaps, than any other city. Her population in 1820, being about one hundred and twenty thousand, and at the present time over one million, the value of her real and personal property, as recently as 1845, reported at about two hundred and forty million dollars, and at the present time over one billion dollars—the magnitude of her trade and commerce, her imports and exports in the year 1867, aggregate over five hundred and sixteen million dollars; her supremacy over every other seaboard city—all attest that to her the Canal has been, and *now is*, "a river of gold flowing into her lap."

It is not the *locality* merely of the city of New York that has secured to her such prosperity and enabled her to absorb the growing business of other cities, and make them pay tribute to her. Other seaboard cities north and south of her have spacious harbors, and are as accessible to all the interior country by railroads as New York, but they have no Erie Canal tributary to them. As the Canal has been the source of her prosperity in years past, so it is the main reliance for her continued enjoyment of this high position in the years to come.

No city can long maintain the controling position she occupies in regard to the foreign commerce of the country without the supplies steadily and certainly furnished by this *interior* and never-failing source.

The financial success of the Canal is without a parallel in the history of similar enterprises. Besides the great increase of material wealth it has brought to all parts of the State, its own account of receipts and expenditures, including its construction, repairs, enlargement and improvements, with interest to September 30th, 1866, as reported by the Auditor of the Canal Depart-

ment, shows a cash balance to its credit of about forty-one and one-half millions of dollars.

The State canal debt, which has sometimes been urged as a formidable objection to any further outlay upon canals, is the offspring of a laudable desire to promote the local as well as the general interests of the State, that has prevailed in the administration of State affairs, and which led to the construction of various local canals, none of which have been financially successful, though of great and lasting benefits to the people of their immediate locality; and the canal debt now resting upon the State is the result of the construction of those canals, the benefits of which pertain to the particular localities; and those localities might reasonably be expected to be foremost in a movement to pay off that debt by a general and equal tax upon all the property of the State, rather than allow the debt to be any impediment in the way of further improving and perfecting the capacity of the Erie Canal to the extent of enabling it to do all the business that may be offered to it, and at such moderate charges that no other route shall be able to compete with it.

Since the original construction of the Canal its prism has been enlarged and its capacity greatly improved. The tonnage of boats navigating it was originally from thirty-five to forty tons; now, boats of two hundred and fifty tons make their voyage through its waters; but yet its size is not that of one hundred feet wide and ten feet deep, as was recommended in the essays of "Hercules." Such a canal, with locks of corresponding dimensions, if constructed without delay, would put to rest all question of its utility or supremacy.

The great and rapid increase of the business of the country, springing directly from the construction of the Canal, brought into existence numerous railroad enterprises, and there are now as many as five or six through lines of railroads engaged to the extent of their capacity in this inland commerce; and yet so great has been the increase of the productions of the country that, with all the increase of facilities for transportation, they are not sufficient to meet the demands upon them; and in the clamor for additional facilities and greater speed, we occasionally hear of more railroads being projected, and see the Canal partially overlooked or entirely ignored.

As a people, we are "faster" than were those of fifty years ago. We think and move faster than they; we transact more business, and amass greater wealth, and are impatient of restraint or delays; but let us not overlook the fact that it would be physically impossible to transact the business of this vast interior commerce by railroads. The electric telegraph will flash our commercial messages instantaneously from San Francisco to New York, but it cannot transport one bushel of wheat. The fleetest horses of Arabia could not be made the beasts of burden to perform a heavy carrying trade. Neither can the railroads, though adapted to the speedy transportation of persons and much of the merchandise and products of the country, perform the immense and heavy freighting business between the West and the East. The main reliance is upon our Canal; and we read with some surprise an editorial in so well informed a newspaper as the New York *Times*, in July last, opposing further appropriations to the canals, and saying, "Water transportation of every kind is rapidly losing its influence in our trade with the interior. * * * The

day of the canals has gone by—they have accomplished their work, and can now be relieved by the superior system of transportation," the railroads.

We might suppose the editor had been romancing, and expect he would next write, (after a pleasant moonlight drive through Central Park,) that the "sun" is an old played-out institution, its heats have become too oppressive, and we can well dispense with it. The moon is more pleasant, and the comforts it supplies are an improvement upon the old system.

The sun is scarcely more necessary to supply those essential elements of our existence and welfare, reflected by the moon, than is the Canal to sustain the commercial supremacy of New York, as well as the prosperity of the railroads engaged with it in carrying on this commerce.

If it were possible for the city of Boston to become the outlet of this Canal, and secure its constantly flowing stream of supplies into her own lap, instead of enriching New York, she would soon reinstate the Cunard steamships at her wharves, and would not feel a necessity for inviting her neighboring merchants to meet her in convention and devise the ways and means for checking the decline of her commercial influence and relative position.

This interior commerce, which enriches all who manage it, is too great a prize to escape the efforts of opposing and competing interests to draw it to other channels, and we see capital and enterprise employed with such well directed energy as merits success, to divide this traffic with New York, and appropriate a part of the golden stream to other and foreign cities. The projected improvements for business on the Mississippi river, by means of barges and of elevators at New Orleans, it is claimed, will draw to that channel a large

volume of the property that has heretofore sought an eastern market by way of this Canal, and thus enrich the shipping interests on that river and the city of New Orleans, at our expense.

Our neighbors of the Dominion of Ontario were early alive to the importance of securing a portion of this growing commerce, and they constructed the Welland Canal, which has for many years diverted no inconsiderable share of this flowing wealth to a foreign channel; and their efforts to this end have not abated. They have constructed extensive lines of railroads, improved the navigation of their rivers, and projected other works of yet greater importance, as connected with this commerce. If they shall construct the Georgian Bay and Toronto Canal, and make the Ottawa River Improvement to Montreal, (especially the latter,) before our Canal is perfected by enlarging its locks and securing a greater depth of water, they will succeed in diverting a larger amount of our legitimate traffic than we can afford to lose. A small portion only of shipments on Lake Ontario find their way to New York, and shipments by the Ottawa river route must of necessity pay their tribute to the cities of Montreal and Quebec.

One of the leading objects in view with all those men who early advocated the improvement of water communication between the interior and tide waters, was to secure this commerce to our own people, and build up our own cities with the products of our enterprise and capital, rather than allow it to be appropriated by our foreign neighbors. These views were deeply impressed upon the mind of that good and loyal Briton, Cadwallader Colden, as early as the year 1724, and they were repeated

by Sir Henry Moore, by General Washington, George Clinton, and every other writer in favor of internal improvements, down to the time of our Canal.

We are now in the enjoyment of the high position which the construction of the Canal was expected to confer upon us; and the benefits it bestows on other States, and upon the nation at large, justly entitle New York to the appellation of the "Empire State." It has been said, by good authority, that the struggle we recently encountered with armed rebellion could not have been successfully carried on but for the sinews of war, the wealth, derived from the productions of the country, through the facilities which this Canal afforded.

If we have not secured, to the full extent, the advantages which the Canal might yield to us, it behooves us to look for the cause and apply the remedy. If any portion of this inheritance is in danger of being wrested from our hands by competing interests, as wise men possessed of the ability to preserve it, we will not fail to counteract such efforts by the legitimate means at our command. Such danger is not to be encountered by the competition of the railroads. The interests of these roads and of the Canal are reciprocal. The roads would not have come into existence but for the stimulus given by the Canal; and now, both of the systems are to a large extent dependent each upon the other.

It is the competition which may arise from other water routes of transit, that may prejudice or put in jeopardy the interests centred in our Canal; and towards this should our counteracting efforts be directed.

Such improvements of the Canal as will secure to it a steady supply of water to the greatest depth admissible, and an enlargement of its locks to a corresponding

extent, with a schedule of tolls as low as would suffice to pay the interest on the cost of the improvements, and an economical administration of its affairs, would enable the Canal to neutralize all competition and secure its supremacy over the commerce of the northern States. Whatever be the necessary expense, the importance of such improvement demands immediate attention. A large debt resting upon the State, incurred in the progress of its internal improvement policy, is put forth as a reason for withholding further appropriations for canals. But that argument cannot apply to this Canal, which, as we have seen, is rich in funds to the extent of many millions of dollars.

It has also been gravely urged in the Constitutional Convention, by a member from the city of New York, that the State should *sell the Canal!* Not because it has not accomplished all that was predicted for it, not for any financial delinquency, but because, as stated, it is impossible to secure an honest administration of its affairs! The *philosopher* who urged this proposition, doubtless predicated his argument on the doctrine of total depravity, and he should have followed his logic to its legitimate conclusion, and proposed that the Convention be dissolved, because constitutions and laws are worthless, it being impossible to secure an honest administration of them!

We cannot afford to allow the supremacy of the Canal to be put in jeopardy. A due regard to the future welfare of our own city will not permit it,—the agricultural interests of our State, to its remotest corners, cannot afford the risk;—the city of New York, least of all, can afford thus to jeopardize its commanding position. Our railroads themselves cannot afford to lose the invig-

orating influence their business receives from this controling source.

Better that the present debt and the expense of further improvements be paid by a tax on all the property of the State, and the tolls placed at the lowest rate consistent with the necessary current expenditures, than suffer a diminution of the golden stream.

We are not such degenerate sons of our fathers that we are unable to appreciate and preserve this rich heritage,—the result of their wisdom and enterprise,—and we *must* carry out to perfection that which they so auspiciously begun, and in which they achieved such signal success, and thus secure to our successors the benefits that will follow, and to our State the high distinction she has earned, through all coming time.